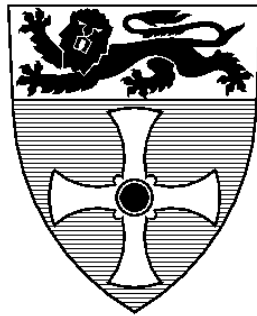


UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE



Sure Start Leam Lane Evaluation



Report of the Evaluation of the LEEPs for 1s and LEEPs for 2s Programmes

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Throughout the research, members of the research team were made welcome at both the LEEPs for 1s and LEEPs for 2s sessions. We are grateful to the group leaders in particular, who had to endure the watchfulness of participant observers. Perhaps the most important participants in this evaluation were the parents and children themselves. They were willing to talk to us about their experiences of the programme, and welcomed the evaluation team week after week. To all of these, we offer our sincere thanks.

Although the evaluation team was led By Jill Clark, the majority of the fieldwork and data collection was carried out by Caroline McCaughey with some observational work and research tool design by Maria Mroz, to whom we record our thanks.

Additional thanks must also be recorded to Avril Tsitsas, our Research Secretary, for the able and efficient transcription of recorded interviews.

Executive Summary

The University team was asked to formally evaluate two programmes within the Leam Lane Sure Start programme – the LEEPs for 1s and Leeps for 2s programmes. The case study took place between January 2005 and May 2005, and used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Data was generated and gathered from interviews (both formal and informal), questionnaires, group discussions, participant observation and documentary analysis. Full details of the research design and process can be found on pages 5 to 8 of this report.

LEEPs for 1s and 2s are designed to benefit both parents (or carers) and children, and is a rolling programme of sessions based on the national PEEP programme, which:

- offers ideas and activities to support children's learning in everyday situations
- is a combination of different activities e.g. stories, songs and craft activities, to be used by parents/ carers and children at home or as part of a group
- focuses on how to make the most of everyday life – listening, talking, playing, singing, sharing books - and having fun!
- is about supporting children's self-esteem and helping children feel good about learning, and
- supports parents and carers in their role as educators, as well as promoting their own learning.

LEEPs for 1s and 2s have been adapted from the PEEP programme to be more area-specific to Leam Lane. There is no formal referral process, it is a 'roll on' 'roll off' programme which is a popular activity which a waiting list.

The findings of the evaluation are positive, and are presented in this report, alongside recommendations which suggest ways of developing the LEEPs programmes further. Conclusions have been drawn and recommendations have been made, based on the findings from data analysis, which include issues such as:

- a need for ongoing review and evaluation, with increased involvement of parent volunteers
- suggestions for improved delivery, including reference to particular activities, and relating the sessions to objectives and learning outcomes
- highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of particular venues and the impact these can have on delivery and participation
- a need for explicit and clear ground rules which are re-iterated for new parents
- illustrating the positive impact of a proactive and continual recruitment strategy
- the many positive aspects of involving parents as volunteers in the delivery, planning and review.

Full details and the reasons for the suggestions are included in pages 40-42 of this report.

Introduction

The three-year evaluation study is funded by Gateshead City Council, and is being undertaken by staff at the Centre for Learning and Teaching at the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. The overall aim of the evaluation is to enable the Sure Start Partnership to:

- Monitor the services offered.
- Examine and track the Programme in relation to the stated objectives and targets.
- Make changes to the programme as a result of findings and recommendations made through the evaluation.

More specifically, the evaluation aims to:

- Monitor the progress of the Sure Start Partnership in achieving its key objectives and targets.
- Review the work practices through which Sure Start is being delivered.
- Assess whether the services being provided achieve good value.
- Assess whether the Sure Start programme is:
 - Adding value to existing services.
 - Involving parents, grandparents and other carers.
 - Providing links and support to services for older children.
 - Promoting participation of local families in the design and working of the programme.

The first phase of the evaluation was a Baseline Survey which was completed in April 2004, which reported that General awareness of Sure Start was high, with the majority of respondents stating that they had heard of Sure Start and only 7% reporting that they had not (Hall and Clark, 2004).

The second phase of the evaluation includes a number of evaluative case studies of particular activities, or projects, offered within the Sure Start Programme. Previous case studies have included an evaluation of a creative project – Messy Days – and an exploration into the roles of professionals working in Sure Start areas. This document reports on the evaluative case study of two projects within the Leam Lane Sure Start Programme, the LEEPs for 1s Project and the LEEPs for 2s Project.

The Research Team

The team was led By Jill Clark, the majority of the fieldwork and data collection was carried out by Caroline McCaughey with our colleague Maria Mroz who also assisted in this process.

The Case Study Method

Case study research is used to conduct an in-depth investigation of an issue at a specific instance and location. When used in social science research, case studies may

help determine the attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs of groups the researchers wish to examine, as well as describe the interactions among those groups.

The project case study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Data was generated and gathered from interviews (both formal and informal), questionnaires, group discussions, participant observation and documentary analysis. Fieldwork took place between January 2005 and April 2005, and analysis and writing took place May to July 2005.

The Research Process

Documentary analysis

Documentation relating to the LEEPs projects was made available to the research team and included:

- copies of the home activities questionnaire (which is completed by the parents and is used as a pre- and post- programme evaluation questionnaire),
- PEEP Open College Network (OCN) Record sheet – completed by parents when they have completed different activities and have evidence (for example, a photograph) worksheet in order to be accredited with a certificate by the Open College Network.
- PEEP Group Review sheet - adapted from a national PEEP document and completed by the group leader and assistant after each session.
- Presentation notes on PEEP at Leam Lane,
- PEEP (Peers Early Education Partnership) two Year Olds document – a national PEEP document.
- Evidence for the Value of PEEP document – a national PEEP document.
- Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) document – a national PEEP document.

The research team were also given copies of the folders that are given to parents when they start the programme. These folders ‘Learning together with Ones’ and ‘Learning together with Twos’ are published by Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) and are used in conjunction with the delivery of the local LEEP programme at Leam Lane.

Interviews

In order to examine the projects in relation to strategy and overall aims and objectives within the Sure Start programme, we formally interviewed key players including the current LEEPs group leaders and a parent. These discussions took place on a one-to-one basis and a semi-structured interview schedule was used which was designed as a result of our observations of the sessions. The interviews were always tape-recorded and fully transcribed. Additionally, respondents were then sent a copy of their transcription and were given an opportunity to check the transcript for accuracies and content. Respondents were also given the opportunity to add or remove any of their comments. Informal discussions with parents/carers took place throughout both of the LEEPs programmes – these took place before, during and after the sessions and revealed a wealth of data and information on views, perceptions and experiences.

Observations

We aimed to observe case study projects wherever possible, and we were able to observe all the sessions of the selected blocks of LEEPs sessions. This enabled the research team to gain valuable insight into the day-to-day processes within the project, and the contexts involved in working with other agencies. The benefits of using such a method were multiple:

- Familiarisation/inception with the locality, the projects, key staff involved, other agencies/services, etc.
- Establishing a rapport with those being researched, particularly the 'users' of the projects being evaluated
- Ease of access to reports, documentation, etc. which may provide evidence of monitoring or evaluation.

The research team took a participant observational approach to the work, and joined in with practical tasks such as setting out the room and preparing refreshments in order to help 'break the ice' and establish a rapport.

The members of the evaluation team were initially introduced to the group by the group leader. However, the members of the evaluation felt that it was also necessary to introduce themselves to each of the parents individually. This worked well, as it re-affirmed exactly who we were and why we were there, and meant we did not have to rely or burden the group leader doing this for us. This helped to break down any barriers and helped the evaluation team form relationships with the parents. This approach worked well, parents spoke openly with members of the evaluation team about their experiences and opinions of the LEEPs programme.

In addition, the research team used a digital camera to collect pictorial data of the venue, room layout, seating plans, etc. All parents signed a University Consent form (see Appendix 3) to agree to this, with the understanding that the research team would protect the anonymity of all the participants, not use real names, and would not use images of children which showed their faces. All the parents agreed to take part in the research.

Fieldwork for the LEEPs for 1s programme took place between January and March 2005. Fieldwork for the LEEPs for 2s programme took place between March and May 2005. The research team were able to attend all the sessions within the two blocks of six sessions that we intended to observe. However, as the Leeps for 1s programme and the LEEPs for 2s programme run throughout the year, we must remember that our evaluation timescale therefore is limited to a 'snapshot' investigation, and findings may appear very different if we were to visit the programme at a different time.

Parent Questionnaire

A brief questionnaire was designed by the research team to be completed by those parents who attended LEEPs sessions. The questionnaires were shown to the group leaders in order to allow any additional areas of interest to be added and also so that the person running the group would be clear about what was being asked of the parents. Continuing our use of reflexive practice, the group leader who led the LEEPs for 1s programme did make some suggestions of how the questionnaire could be altered in places. We took her suggestions on board and made the appropriate changes. Parents were asked if they would be prepared to complete a questionnaire

before they were administered. The parents were informed verbally of the purpose of the questionnaires and were promised that their responses would be treated confidentially by the research team. We were anxious that parents would have the opportunity to be open and honest when completing the questionnaires, and avoided the involvement of any Sure Start staff, thus ensuring full confidentiality. All of the parents agreed to complete the questionnaire.

It was our original intention to complete questionnaires in, and shortly after sessions, with the parent participants, where we would explore their views of how the project is being delivered and managed. However, the timing of the sessions, and the nature of the project (parents with one or more children under the age of 5) meant that it was difficult to protect time and to ensure appropriate supervision and attention was paid to the very young children in the group. Parents had other commitments after the group and the children could not be supervised by unfamiliar adults without causing them distress. Despite this, the evaluation team were able to informally add to their understanding of the project by observation and participation in group sessions.

It had been suggested by a Sure Start member of staff that we should administer the questionnaires within the sessions in an attempt to overcome issues of literacy among parents and non-return of questionnaires. During the LEEPs for 1s programme, the evaluation team tried this approach. However, due to the structure and time restraints within the group it was not possible to administer and complete all questionnaires in this way. One questionnaire was completed using this method and the lady who completed the questionnaire said she *“felt very uncomfortable and put on the spot”* and requested that we did not use the questionnaire as part of our research. As a result, we abandoned this approach and gave all the parents a copy of the questionnaire at the sixth session on the 7th March and asked them to return them to a member of the research team at the following session. We handed out questionnaires to 7 parents and we received 2 completed questionnaires at the following session. A reminder letter with another copy of the questionnaire (with a stamped, self-addressed envelope) was sent to the remaining parents and a further 2 completed questionnaires were returned at a later date, which meant we had an overall (if slightly disappointing) response rate of 57%.

During the LEEPs for 2s programme, the evaluation team gave the parents a copy of the questionnaire at the 4th session on the 13th April, and parents were asked to return the questionnaires the following week. Two questionnaires were returned the following week and a further two were returned at the 6th session. We handed out questionnaires to 7 parents and received 4 completed questionnaires, which meant like the response rate of those parents in LEEPs for 1s, we had an overall response rate of 57%.

This fairly low number of completed questionnaires is disappointing, and perhaps will not illustrate a clear representation of the parent group. However, the returned questionnaires can be seen as illustrative of the parent group, and we opted to use the questionnaire data to underpin our thematic analysis and writing about the LEEPs for 1s and 2s programmes.

A copy of the parent questionnaire used for LEEPs for 1s can be found in Appendix 1
A copy of the parent questionnaire used for LEEPs for 2s can be found in Appendix 2

The PEEP Programme – the national picture

Introduction

The initial idea behind the local Leam Lane LEEPs programme was developed from a nationwide programme known as Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP). PEEP was originally set up as a registered charity in 1995. PEEP groups were initially developed in the area of Blackbird Keys and neighbouring estates in South East Oxford which were regarded as economically deprived areas. Although the PEEP programme started in a small area of Oxford it is now being taken up nationally through a variety of organisations, such as Sure Start and Children's Centres, Family Centres, Early Start Projects and Local Authorities. PEEP is being used throughout the United Kingdom by different people and agencies who work with parents/carers and young children, such as:

... teachers and teaching assistants, health visitors and midwives, family learning workers, nursery nurses, Sure Start and family centre workers, speech and language therapists, librarians and many other early years workers.

(See <http://www.peep.org.uk/standard.asp?id=117>)

According to their website, the PEEP mission statement is stated as being to:

...contribute towards a significant improvement in educational attainment by whole communities of children, from their birth, by working with parents and carers. (See: <http://www.peep.org.uk/section.asp?id=8>).

The PEEP programme is aimed at parents and carers and their children from birth to five years. PEEP is available to all parents of children aged 0-5 in a PEEP area and groups normally take place in pre-school settings. PEEP recognises that parents and carers are children's first educators and aims to support parents' and carers' in this important role. Therefore, the PEEP programme values parents and carers personal experience of their child and builds on this experience by offering ideas and information. The PEEP programme has been developed to work with, and alongside, parents as equal partners and their views and experiences help to influence the development of the programme.

More specifically, the PEEP programme:

- *offers ideas and activities to support children's learning in everyday situations*
- *is a combination of different activities e.g. stories, songs and craft activities, to be used by parents/ carers and children at home or as part of a group*
- *focuses on how to make the most of everyday life – listening, talking, playing, singing, sharing books - and having fun!*
- *is about supporting children's self-esteem and helping children feel good about learning, and*
- *supports parents and carers in their role as educators, as well as promoting their own learning.*

(See: <http://www.peep.org.uk/section.asp?id=5>).

The aims of the PEEP programme are numerous and can be summarised by the following:

1. To promote parents' and carers' awareness of children's very early learning and development through making the most of everyday activities and interactions.
2. To support parents/carers in their relationships with their children, so that the children's self-esteem will be enhanced.
3. To affirm the crucial role of parents/carers as children's first educators.
4. To support parents/carers in the development of their children's literacy and numeracy.
5. To support parents/carers so that they can encourage the development of positive learning dispositions.
6. To promote and support parents' and carers' lifelong learning.

(See: <http://www.peep.org.uk/standard.asp?id=78>).

PEEP is based on what individuals do on a daily basis when they care for and look after children. PEEP uses the ORIM (see below) framework which was developed by Peter Hannon. The ORIM framework arose out of earlier work in Sheffield (Hannon, 1995), to develop and evaluate literacy work with parents, and in so doing, to facilitate changes in the thinking and practice of teachers and other early childhood educators. On the basis of this framework parents and carers can provide:

Opportunities for learning through everyday events

Recognition and value of children's efforts and achievements

Interactions with children about what they do and how they feel

Modelling of behaviour and activities. Children learn all sorts of things by watching and then trying out what they have seen.

(See: <http://www.peep.org.uk/standard.asp?id=78>).

PEEP has developed a structured curriculum for each age group. Each week the group is based on a theme and specific books, rhymes, songs and activities are included. The PEEP groups follow the same structure each week and rhymes and songs are repeated each week. This helps the children to become accustomed to routine. The curriculum for each age group is based on specific areas of children's development such as increasing self esteem, listening and reading skills. Therefore, the curriculum offers a developmental, structured approach that is flexible enough to meet the needs of different communities and settings.

Although the PEEP programme has been running for ten years, it is only recently that it has become a programme which is used nationwide. Evaluations of PEEP programmes are few, but the research that does exist to date is positive in both its effect on the children and parents. One research study, Evangelou and Sylva (2003) reports on a longer study of the effects of PEEP. This study followed three and four year olds participating in PEEP between 1998 and 2001. The study showed that children from families engaged with PEEP benefited in learning and self-esteem. These children made greater progress than others in:

- Vocabulary

- Language comprehension
- Understanding about books and print
- Number concepts.

Their self-esteem was higher. They felt more confident in what they could do both physically and mentally. Three-year-olds, specifically, were more confident about being accepted by their mothers.

Further research explores the role of PEEP in supporting parents as adult learners (Sylva *et al.*, 2004) was published in November 2004. The study found that PEEP parents, compared to a similar group of non-PEEP parents:

- reported significantly greater awareness about how to help their child's literacy development
- had improved their socio-economic status (as measured by their job)
- had taken more courses, particularly in basic skills, though hadn't changed their formal qualifications.
- Parents also considered PEEP to be a source of support and encouragement.

There is one report of a PEEP programme within a Sure Start area. Whilst this does not include any research findings, this report presents the preliminary work carried out on the baseline evaluation of the PEEP programme. Starting with a brief introduction to the rationale of Sure Start and the inclusion of the PEEP philosophy, the report goes on to present the design of the evaluation project. The material describes the participatory approach used to construct the questionnaire, and discusses the ethical matters that emerged in the process (Austin Sunnyhill Sure Start, 2004).

The Leam Lane Leeps Programme – the local picture

Introduction

In the Leam Lane area of Gateshead, Sure Start currently offers two programmes based on the national PEEP programme. However, the programme is known as LEEP, to help identify that it is based within the Leam Lane area. At the time of our research, they offered a LEEPs for 1s group and a LEEPs for 2s group. Leam Lane has also in the past run a Baby LEEPs programme, but this was not running at the time of the evaluation and therefore does feature in this research report.

The LEEPs programme is closely linked with the Birth to Three Matters framework, which is designed to support children in their earliest years. Birth to three matters focuses on:

... child development; effective practice; examples of play activities to promote play and learning; guidance on planning and resourcing; meeting diverse needs. It is a milestone in recognising the contribution made to the development of our youngest children by the adults who work with them.

(See:

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/communications/childcareworkers/birthtothreematters/abouttheframework/>).

In the broader sense, the LEEPs programme is housed under Objective 3 of the National Sure Start Aims and Objectives – ‘Improving the Ability to Learn’, which more specifically, states:

... by encouraging high quality environments and childcare that promote early learning, provide stimulating and enjoyable play, improve language skills and through early identification and support of children with special needs (Leam Lane Area Delivery Plan 2001: 85).

The LEEPs programme is also particularly relevant to one of the specific national targets of Sure Start:

All children in the area to have access to good quality play and learning opportunities, helping progress towards early learning goals when they get to school (Leam Lane Area Delivery Plan 2001: 85).

The PEEP programme started in the Leam Lane area in June 2003 and was re-named LEEPs in June 2004. LEEPs are ongoing programmes, with one, one-hour session offered weekly, within term time. LEEPs for 1s is aimed at children aged between 12 months and 2 years old, and LEEPs for 2s is aimed at children between 2 years old and 3 years old. LEEPs for 1s takes place on a Monday morning and the LEEPs for 2s sessions take place on a Wednesday afternoon. The number of parents and children who attend the LEEPs sessions each week vary, but there is usually a ‘core’ group of approximately five parents and their children, who regularly attend each week.

Although LEEPs is a structured programme, it is flexible enough to meet the needs of the parents and children who attend the sessions. The LEEPs programme is not exclusive to mothers - fathers, grandparents and other carers are also welcome. LEEPs has proved to be quite a popular programme, parents and children attend the sessions voluntarily (there is no referral process). There is no waiting list as such, carers and children that attend one of the LEEPs programmes such as LEEPs for 1s (or where possible, Baby LEEPs) are informed of, and encouraged to attend, the LEEPs for 2s when their child turns two years old.

Session attendance

Given the ‘roll on’ roll off’ nature of the Leeps sessions, inevitably, the attendance at the sessions we observed varied from week to week. Each programme has an attendance list, which contains details of parents who have expressed an interest in that particular programme. Attending the LEEPs for 1s sessions there was a stable cohort of 4-5 carers (all mothers and/or grandmothers) with occasional newcomers (numbers varied between 4 and 8 carers during our observations). During the course of the evaluation one mother naturally ceased attending as she gave birth to a new baby and one new mother joined the programme at the fourth session of our observed block of sessions. The carers and children attending the programme during the evaluation had been attending between 6 and 18 months altogether. One parent and child who had been attending the programme for 18 months had previously attended the same programme (LEEPs for 1s) with another child.

In the LEEPs for 2s programme, similarly there was a stable cohort of 3-6 carers (again, all were mothers alongside one grandmother) that attended the sessions we observed. There were originally 7 carers on the attendance list (those carers who had expressed an interest in attending the group and had agreed to attend) and one carer did not attend any of the sessions we observed. The reason for her non-attendance was unclear to the evaluation team. When she was contacted by Sure Start staff she expressed her wish to attend the programme but sadly, she continually failed to attend.

There were originally 11 parents on the LEEPs for 1s attendance list and due to various reasons (which again were unclear to the evaluation team) some of the carers never attended or ceased to attend. This is not uncommon in any type of community-based project, and is often inevitable. However, the drop in the number of parents attending the sessions was commented on by a member of Sure Start staff as ‘*obviously a bit disappointing*’. There was, however, a stable cohort of 4-5 carers who attended regularly each week. The commitment and motivation of this core group of carers was described positively by one member of staff:

... the ‘core group’ if you like, who do attend are very motivated, want to be involved, want to be there, and it shows in the children as well ... so the group that does regularly attend, are starting to get to know each other, are beginning to feel comfortable with one another.

Inevitably, on joining a group such as this where there is an already established ‘core group’ of parents, who have come to know each other well, this may appear somewhat threatening or uncomfortable for ‘new’ attendees. This was certainly noticed, and commented on, by one regular parent attendee, who told us:

there was other members joined the group and I did feel that they sort of, always kept themselves together in a sub-group and I didn’t feel like they really mixed at that point. I felt like the children mixed okay but I felt like the adults were very segregated and they sat in one particular area.

Interestingly, this idea that parents ‘new’ to the group felt uncomfortable was not expressed by parents or staff of the LEEPs for 2s programme. Quite the opposite was observed by a Sure Start staff member who said:

I’ve never seen any sort of animosity towards anybody in the group, they always seem to welcome anybody else who’s attending, which I’ve noticed with a lady who was referred to me by a health visitor, she is quite shy and maybe hasn’t got a lot of confidence and even within the first session, I saw all the parents going over and before I’d had the opportunity to do it, kind of tell them about the structure of the session and (group leader) will give you a file, and this is what we do, ... it was lovely to see that.

Reasons why this situation is slightly different for parents could be that most of the parents/carers attending LEEPs for 2s have already taken part in several other Sure Start activities, including LEEPs for 1s. This illustrates the importance and value of early positive experiences of Sure Start activities and the subsequent ‘pull through’ to

other programmes or projects. Alongside this, importantly, is that parents/carers have built up the confidence and enthusiasm to then encourage parents new to the group.

Although the attendance of carers and children who attended LEEPs for 1s of the observed sessions did drop, it was explicitly unclear as to why. A Sure Start staff member did mention that attendance may have dropped as the sessions observed took place over winter when there had been some very cold weather and snow. Most of the sessions also took place at 9.30 on a Monday morning – this session time had been altered to 9.30am to accommodate one parent who said she was unable to attend the sessions at 10.00am due to other engagements. Despite the flexibility and accommodating nature of the group leader (and the other parents/carers), this particular parent, however, did not attend any of the six sessions we observed. It was therefore agreed (again, among parents and Sure Start staff) that the session start time would revert to the original 10.00am.

The attendance at LEEPs for 2s was constant throughout the observed sessions except from the sixth session when only 3 carers and children attended. Obviously this low attendance was disappointing, however, a number of carers had telephoned the leader prior to the session to offer their apologies. This cannot be seen as a negative feature, but rather a realistic picture of how factors outside of the programme naturally sometimes affect attendance.

In order to attract new carers to attend LEEPs there is a need for advertisement and recruitment of new carers. As LEEPs are continual rolling programmes, advertisement and publicity is a constant process. Posters advertising the programme are permanently available and displayed in certain places. The programme is not advertised in some public places as it causes problems to do with the programme only being available in certain catchment areas. It is advertised through the local Sure Start office, Doctors surgeries and local parent and toddler groups. The different ways in which parents became aware of the LEEPs programme varied. One parent read about the programme on a notice board, one learnt about it through her health clinic and two parents became aware through Sure Start staff, i.e., their Health Visitor and Midwife, and Sure Start newsletters.

The process of recruiting new carers and parents to attend the LEEPs for 1s programme was being undertaken towards the end of the evaluation period, and was explained by a Sure Start member of staff:

I am trying to recruit at the moment, and to probably over-subscribe rather than under-subscribe and that's probably due to me thinking... if we get 12, or if we get extras, you know it's going to be too many, and actually in reality you quickly discover that that's not going to happen, and that you need to over-subscribe in order to get a regular number.

Although there was originally 11 carers and children who expressed an interest in attending the programme and were subsequently added to the attendance list, the evaluation team felt that if all 11 carers and children attended this would possibly be too many considering the size of the venue and the fact that there was only one member of staff available on a regular basis to deliver the programme. However, the over-subscription method of recruitment is a positive and realistic feature of the

programme, and does go some way towards generating the optimum group size (which emerges following natural 'attrition') which is both manageable and practical. Exactly what an 'optimum' size is debatable, and is obviously dependent on venue and staffing. From a parental point of view, one parent believed that a smaller group would be more personal and beneficial:

I do think that the smaller the class, I think the better because I do feel like when LEEPs for 1s started this time, I think there was about eight or nine adults maybe, and I did feel like that I didn't really get anywhere because by the time you go around saying hello to everybody there isn't a lot of time to actually do the activity...

The recruitment of new parents/carers and children to the LEEPs for 2s programme does not appear to be as much of a difficult issue, as it appears to be a natural progression for carers and children to attend LEEPs for 2s when they can no longer attend LEEPs for 1s. When children are approaching 2 years, their carers are made aware of the fact that their child is reaching the upper age limit for the group and are informed of the LEEPs for 2s programme. Sure Start staff endeavour to make the move from 1s to 2s as easy and as non-threatening for parents as they can. One staff member told us:

... if they weren't familiar with me, I would go over to the 1s [group] to introduce myself, make them comfortable, obviously the different venue and things, they would be invited to come over to the LEEPs for 2s.

This proactive approach is a positive feature which is working well, and should be highlighted as good practice. Data from our questionnaire survey revealed that LEEPs for 1s was attracting parents it aims to, i.e., those parents within the Sure Start Leam Lane geographical boundaries. Of the respondents who completed the parent questionnaire, half were living in the Leam Lane area and the length of time they lived in the Leam Lane area ranged from 6yrs to 8 1/2 yrs. All the respondents were mothers and 75% had other children other than the child/children that attended LEEPs for 1s.

The majority of mothers (75%) told us that they knew other people at the group before they started. However, only one respondent said that she arranged to meet up with people from LEEPs for 1s outside of the sessions. The ages of the children that attended the programme during our evaluation ranged from 17months to 24 months old. The LEEPs for 1s programme is aimed for children up to 24 months, therefore some of the children attending the current programme were close to reaching the upper age limit.

One respondent reported to us that her child attended a pre- school activity outside of the Sure Start umbrella. All the respondent replied that they attended other projects or programmes provided by Sure Start Leam Lane, namely 'Gym Time' and the Sure Start nursery. Respondents also reported that their children attended many 'one-off' events provided by Sure Start, such as trips and events specifically organised for Dads to attend on Saturdays.

Of the respondents who completed the parent questionnaire for the LEEPs for 2s programme, again half reported that they lived in the Leam Lane area of Gateshead and the other 50% lived in the area of Wardley. The length of time they lived in the area ranged from 14-30 years with an average duration of 22 years.

The majority of the respondents (75%) were mothers and there was one grandmother. The grandmother said she became aware of the LEEPs programme through her grandchild's parents and that she had only attended this particular LEEPs for 2s programme. However, her grandchild has also attended LEEPs for 1s with his mother. Overall, 75% of the children who attended LEEPs for 2s had also previously attended LEEPs for 1s. One parent and child also reported having attended Baby LEEPs. One parent and child reported that they were relatively 'new' to Sure Start services, and LEEPs for 2s was the first programme they had been involved in. This mother said she had joined the programme so that her child would have the opportunity '*to interact with other children*'.

Half of the respondents reported that they knew other people in the group before starting LEEPs for 2s and that they do arrange to meet with them outside of the programme sessions. The other half reported that they did not know any of the other carers and children before attending the group and they do not socialise with other members outside of the sessions.

The children who attended the Leeps for 2s programme ranged from 2 years to 2 years 11 months. Not surprisingly, it was the older children in the group who had been attending the programme the longest. Of the respondents to our questionnaire, 75% reported that their child attended other Sure Start activities such as LEEPs for 1s and Messy Days; and 50% also accessed services run by other organisations. All of the respondents said they had, or cared for, other children other than the child that attended LEEPs for 2s.

Venue

With any programme, a dedicated, identifiable and purpose-designed venue is desirable, particularly with reference to a project that is designed for such young children. However, what is desirable is not always practical, and the LEEPs for 1s programme we observed was held in a room in the local church hall.



Before each session, it was necessary for the group leader to spend considerable time setting up the room. Only the carpeted area of the room was used for the sessions. There were two duvets placed on the carpet and numerous bean bags for the carers to sit on if they wished.



The creative activities took place on the duvets, and if the activity was particularly messy splash mats were placed on top of the duvets to protect them from glue and other substances.

A Sure Start staff member admitted that the venue used for the programme at the time of our research was “*not ideal*”, (Sure Start staff member) as it was rather cold. As the LEEPs for 1s sessions we observed took place over the winter months, this meant the room felt even colder than usual. A Sure Start staff member commented on this and the difficulties of getting the room warm in time for the parents and children arriving:

it's been extremely cold over the winter which, you know, I'm really uncomfortable with because it's... it doesn't matter how early you put the heating on when it's really cold.

One of the parents echoed this view when asked if there was anything about the LEEPs for 1s programme she would like to change:

Room warm on arrival and stay that way.

Throughout our observations, however, we were unaware of any of the children complaining of the cold. This was also suggested by a Sure Start staff member who said:

... to be honest, the children don't seem particularly bothered, it's all the adults who are...

Despite these concerns, however, in other ways the venue did meet the practical demands of the LEEPs for 1's programme, such as a carpet area for use for the duration of the session, a kitchen area for refreshment preparation and a dedicated space where children can sit and eat together. There was no potential for leaving the children to play in a specifically designed play area that was safe and yet demarcated from the rest of the room – this may have allowed parents a short time to talk to each other, Sure Start staff or the researchers (whilst watching their child).

A Sure Start staff member did comment on the positive aspects of the room:

I think it's a good size and it's not a bad room, in the respect that it's partly carpeted and it's partly not, that it has a hatch to the kitchen, and that it's a space where everything's visible, so you know when you're dealing with a one-year old age group, you can be aware of them all the time, you're not going to lose them around the corner... so generally speaking it's not a particularly dangerous room for any reason, it's fairly safe and it's contained

However, one of the parents did question the suitability and safety of the room:

I do think not all of it is child-friendly for the age group that's in, I mean obviously it's a multi-purpose room, but there's a few times I've thought "oh, that's not very safe!"

Another parent said she would prefer to attend the LEEPs for 1s sessions in an alternative space which was more child-friendly, such as the space similar to the crèche facility provided by the Sure Start Leam Lane programme. This parent gave an example when the heating was off at the Methodist Church and the LEEPs session took place in the nursery. She recognises the fact that whilst the children did not actually participate in the session as they were playing with all the toys, she was satisfied as it was a secure environment and felt her child was safe:

... we went into the crèche and they took no notice because they wanted to play with all of these toys you see, but obviously because that is what it's aimed for, it's child friendly and it's got safety gates on and...knowing there are things around that are safe.

The LEEPs for 1s programme is intended to be housed in the new Sure Start building which is due to be complete in summer 2005. A dedicated space and resources are

required for the programme. We would recommend – if possible - that a suitable space be identified and used for the sessions which has access to sinks and adequate heating, and suitable demarcated areas and spaces for ‘messy activities’ to take place alongside an area suitable for children to sit, eat and interact with their parents.

Our suggestions were echoed by a member of Sure Start staff who told us it would be useful to have:

... a comfortable corner like a story corner, not least (a) from a practical basis of not having to lug everything but (b) because children go very quickly and become aware that that's a story corner and therefore relate it to, this is the time that we sit down and then we go quiet.

The idea of having a story corner would also add a specific structure to the sessions in that the children could identify certain areas of the space and anticipate what is to happen next:

They're [the children] one year old, I don't expect them to sit there in silence, but this is when we sit down and have a story or this is when we sit down and listen, ... and children pick that up incredibly quickly. Whereas when you're doing it as part of a session, they're doing other things and everything's happening in the same part of the room, there's no differentiation for them (Sure Start staff member).

A more defined space may also help the children to become more accustomed to the environment used by LEEPs for 2s and other crèche/nursery provision.

The LEEPs for 2s sessions took place in a nursery attached to a local school. This venue was very well suited for the delivery of a programme such as LEEPs. The nursery is well-equipped and therefore already has all the materials and toys required for the LEEPs programme. On a practical level, this also therefore reduces the need for Sure Start staff to carry and transport materials and resources from one place to another. One of the main criticisms of the Methodist as a venue for the delivery of the LEEPs programme was the extra time required to prepare the room before the parents and children arrived:

... to help to set up, because it's setting up that room on your own, especially when it's early in the morning, it's quite a task, getting all the stuff out.

Having access and use of the nursery at the local school is beneficial on a number of levels. It gives the children and their carers an opportunity to become familiar with the building, as a number of the children who attend LEEPs for 2s, may - and in some cases will - soon be attending the nursery in the future. In addition, having access to the materials at the nursery also reduces the need for Leeps staff to buy new resources:

... we've got every area of the nursery available to us you know from the creative to the role play without having to really go out and buy all the role play toys.



As the nursery is specifically designed for children a little older than those who attend LEEPs for 2s, there is the possibility that some of the toys and materials may not be age-appropriate for children so young. This was recognised by a Sure Start staff member who said:

The only kind of negative point that I pick up on that is that the toys available are actually for Foundation Stage children, so now and again there is the risk of there might be like smaller beads and things like that.

Whilst in the nursery for LEEPs sessions, the child is always accompanied by either their carer on a one-to-one basis, a Sure Start staff member or a parent volunteer. Carers are aware that supervision of children is provided whilst the carers are taking part in an activity, but are reminded by Sure Start staff that they are ultimately responsible for their own children. Carers are initially informed of this as part of the ground rules set when they start attending the programme. One staff member told us:

The ground rules at the beginning session are so parents know that the children are their responsibility and that this is a nursery for slightly older children and they should be aware of that. But obviously, as staff you do keep your eyes open and try to prevent anything getting in the way.

However, this was generally not regarded as a significant problem, and the positive features of the nursery as a venue for LEEPs for 2s out-weighed this concern.



Structure and Delivery

The LEEPs sessions are fairly structured and the different parts of the sessions do follow the same sequence from week to week. This helps to familiarise young children with a sense of routine and structure. Each week parents (or their carers) and their children arrived at different times. To keep children occupied whilst this happens, the children have the opportunity to read the books supplied by Sure Start staff. We observed that this did work well, as inevitably, parents and children arrived at different times, and so it not only helped to keep the children occupied, but also fitted well with the explicit aim of PEEP/LEEPs that is to encourage early understanding of books and print. All the parents and children did read the books while waiting for the other parents and children to arrive. The parents and children also had the opportunity to take some of the books to read at home and return the following week. The evaluation team observed that this opportunity to borrow books and take them home was a valued and well-used resource in both LEEPs programmes.

At the first session, all parents and children are given a copy (to keep) of the National Peeps documents - 'Learning together with Ones' folder (for the LEEPs for 1s) and the 'Learning together with Twos' folder (for the LEEPs for 2s programme). Whilst the evaluation team found no direct evidence of these folders being used at home, parents/carers did give examples of particular activities (suggested in the folders) they had completed with their child outside of the sessions. The folders themselves are expensive (£25 each) and so this is clearly a resource which has financial implications for the LEEPs programmes, particularly given that if one parent/carer attends Baby LEEPs, 1s and 2s, they will in fact receive three folders. One Sure Start staff member voiced her concern about the costs involved in giving out these folders and said with regards to future working:

.... no, I wouldn't give them the folders, just in terms of ... it's more cost effective not to, it's £25 per folder and then if you're giving them one to baby, three times however many, it's an unnecessary expense when you could spend it on... resources

Whilst cost will always be in issue, the evaluation team believe that the folders are a valued resource for parents, and certainly with the LEEPs for 2s programme, they were used as a sound basis for the sessions. As they are nationally developed and evidence-based, this strength can add a certain validity to the local LEEPs programmes and help to distinguish LEEPs from other 'mother and toddler groups' – a concern which was expressed by one member of staff. If funding them becomes a serious concern, we would recommend that perhaps that Leam Lane develops its own folders (still based on the PEEP documentation if legally possible) and that it is 'tailor-made' for the Leam Lane area. Whilst there will inevitably still be costs involved, they may be less than the £25 currently charged by PEEP.

Following the first session, subsequent sessions and activities covered within the programme are based on suggestions outlined in these folders. Generally, each topic is run over a three week period, and takes a similar format. Week 1 is a discussion session; week 2 is an observation session and week 3 is a creative session. During the sessions we observed for both the two Leeps programmes, none of the topics ran over a three week period. However, given the nature of the topics and themes covered in

the sessions, this format was not always appropriate. As an example, one of the sessions we observed the topic 'tantrums' was covered in the LEEPs for 2s programme.

During the first session on this topic - the discussion session - the children were supervised by a parent volunteer while the Sure Start staff member discussed the topic of tantrums with the carers. Relating to, and in conjunction with the 'Learning together with Twos' folder, parents were asked to discuss two questions on a handout provided by the Sure Start staff member. The two questions asked were: 'Why do children have tantrums?' and 'What can we do to prevent children having tantrums?'. For this topic there was no formal observation session as it would only be appropriate if the children (or a child) were actually having a 'tantrum'. During the second session on this topic – the creative session - carers and children carried on exploring the theme of tantrums and managing bad behaviour and made books using pictures and photographs to illustrate things or situations that made the children happy, sad, frightened and angry.

The structure of individual sessions is fairly uniform, and follows a format used successfully in other Sure Start projects such as 'Messy Days'. Once everyone has arrived, the session usually begins with the 'Welcome Song' where each child and parent is individually welcomed to the group. An ice-breaking activity then follows, for example, singing a few songs accompanied with actions. The group leader then introduces the session, and the activities within it. The activity part of the sessions is the main section and a large proportion of time is spent on it. Following the activity (which takes place on the carpeted area in LEEPs for 1s and in the main nursery in LEEPs for 2s) the children are given a drink and fruit. After the food has been eaten a Sure Start staff member reads a story. Finally, the session finishes with the Goodbye song.

The structure of the LEEPs for 1s and the LEEPs for 2s programmes are identical, and so the transition and pull-through from LEEPs for 1s to 2s is less stressful and disruptive for the carers and children. Aside from the actual content of the two programmes and the venue, the LEEPs for 1s and 2s programmes are very similar. This similarity was noted by a Sure Start staff member who said that it was a positive feature:

... the actual content of the sessions, I think, is quite similar but obviously at a different developmental level. It's quite an easy transition if you like, the structure is very similar anyway from the 1s to the 2s, so they're quite used to what's expected of them when they arrive and how things are going to run.

The overall structure of the sessions works well, as there seems to be a balance of leader and parent led activities, time for children and parents to socialise, alongside time for relaxation and eating. It must be stressed that all aspects of the LEEPs sessions involve learning (for both adults and children) in many forms. This learning can be explicit, i.e., in developing fine motor skills to join in the action rhymes or to turn pages in a book, to develop language skills such as adding to the children's spoken vocabulary. Other skills are also addressed such as an introduction in turn taking and learning to share but these must be understood in the context of what is typical for children aged between one and two so that reasonable expectations are set

both by parents and the leader. Some guidance from the leader or other parents about why the children are finding certain social niceties such as sharing difficult may be helpful in enabling parents to respond appropriately to 'unsuitable' behaviour without unnecessary chastisement of the children. These ideas were echoed by a Sure Start staff member:

So within an activity - learning to share, learning to sit and eat together, singing together, it's aiming to get them to recognise their name... obviously by two they recognise their own name but as they go through a sort of self-recognition., So, i.e., the point of the 'hello song', including their name every week, and looking towards them and encouraging them and repeating that name, so that they know the song's coming and they know that they're, that we're talking about them...

A number of 'ground rules' are stated when new parents join the group. These ground rules are general and are taken directly from the PEEP training documentation. These ground rules appear to work effectively in providing structure. A Sure Start staff member commented that she had never encountered any problems relating to them thus far:

... we did set ground rules at the beginning, which to be honest, were ground rules that came from a basis of previous people's ground rules and came from the training, of things like, if there's anything that's discussed within this room should remain confidential and I will adhere to that also unless there's any issues of child protection or ... so I have to inform them about that sort of thing. I haven't had any real issues or problems or dealing around the area of confidentiality or child protection or anything very serious to date.

The ground rules are numerous and do cover a number of different issues as noted by a Sure Start staff member:

The list is quite long now but everything really from how we had no smacking policies and things like that, it needs to be clear to them at the start so we don't have to kind of raise that issue. Obviously no smoking, during talk times they have to respect everybody's point of view, listening to each other, just quite basic things, and obviously the big one is that the children are their responsibility.

The ground rules appear to be valued and respected by both parents and staff. However, they were not mentioned or referred to at any of the sessions we observed, even when a new parent and child joined the group. We would recommend that the ground rules were more explicit and each parent given a copy of them in front of the folders that they receive when they first attend the programme. This is probably quite important given the 'roll on' 'roll off' nature of the programmes and the potential turnover of different parents attending. One Sure Start staff member suggested a further ground rule which she felt was missing in relation to the story time part of the programme:

... maybe in the first session, the ground rules... stress the story is for the children, and the parents... you know, could be quiet basically, there is a little

bit of chatting between the parents, the children walking off, I know you can't always maintain the attention of a one-year old, just to try and encourage them that that's important.

The theme, or topic, of each session is important in laying the foundations for what is to follow both during the session and maybe for the future sessions if a topic is covered over the three weekly formats. It is also important to inform and explain why parents and carers might choose to invest time and energy doing and talking about the chosen topic outside of the sessions. During the observed sessions, the introduction to the activities was often brief and as noted by a Sure Start staff member '*not necessarily always made clear*' what the child or parent would achieve directly and indirectly, nor why the activity had been chosen. There is a tension here, raised by a Sure start staff member about the group leader being too directive with the group, which might have the effect of '*putting them off*' attending. One possible way to help overcome this difficulty, and to help to give parents the appropriate information needed would be to have a second staff member available at all of the sessions. This idea was echoed by a Sure Start staff member who said this second member could:

...take the children and distract them while you can have some 'talk time' so that the objectives are made clear and so on, and you can have some discussion with the parents.

However, despite the concerns of the sessions being 'too directive', without some more 'formal' input then it might be difficult to distinguish between these sessions offered at Sure Start and other 'mother and toddler' groups in the minds of the participants. In addition, it might be possible that the parents would want more input into how to play with and work with their child - after all, they have volunteered to attend these sessions. In the sessions that we observed there appeared to be little direct feedback to parents/children about what they had done or how well they were doing it, similarly no criteria were suggested for 'successful' tasks being achieved, whether that be 'joining in' or 'making marks', etc. Perhaps parents could have been encouraged to comment on how well their child had done with encouragement from the Sure Start staff member and specific positive feedback given to the parent and child about the task in order to reiterate the value of their joint effort. The research team would recommend that wherever possible, this approach be adopted as part of the session delivery.

Although the national PEEP programme that the LEEPs programmes are built on is based on the ORIM framework, throughout our observations no mention was made to this framework or any other early education goals or policies. The Sure Start staff member did mention on a few occasions the importance of the content of the sessions in preparing the children to learn to read. However, no other references were made, and again it should be acknowledged that the evaluation provides a 'snapshot' illustration of the programme at that time.

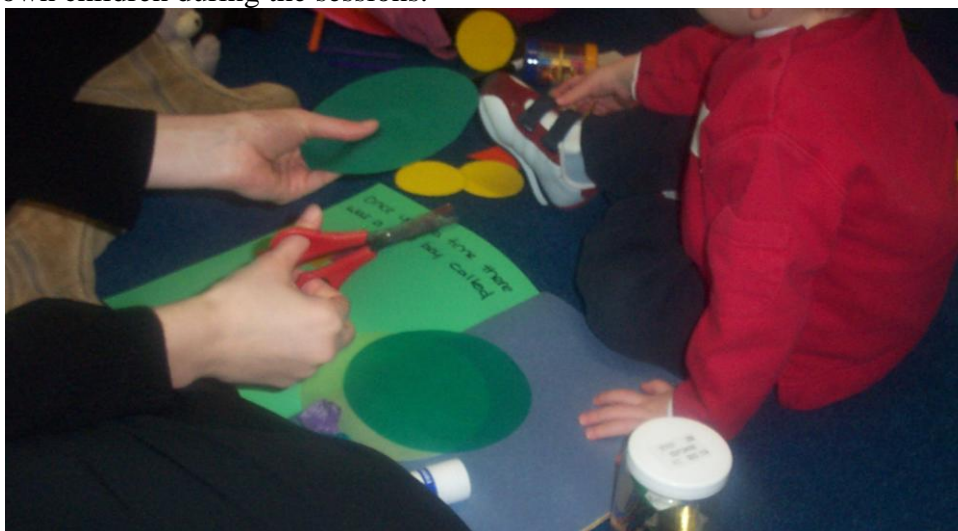
At the LEEPs for 1s sessions we observed, each one had a particular task, or theme, and included collage, noise, names, baby sign language and making books. The LEEPs for 2s sessions we observed covered the themes of numbers, tantrums, making books, managing behaviour and pretend play. The research team recommends that each session should remain themed, but that the relationship to early education goals

could be made more explicit at the beginning of each session. A Sure Start staff member was aware of the need for this to be more explicit when she said she was aware that the aims and objectives of the individual sessions were not 'necessarily made clear'. This information could be given briefly, and quickly, and would keep the session child-focussed, but with an additional component that would be parent- based also.

Specific tasks in the sessions we observed were largely chosen from the 'Learning Together with Ones' and 'Learning Together with Twos' folders with some additional tasks being set by a Sure Start staff member. At times it appeared that the tasks chosen were not always appropriate for the developmental level of the children and required the adults to carry out rather more of the activity than the child e.g. making a book. Whilst we cannot underestimate the learning processes and benefits associated with this for both parents and their children, we would recommend that the tasks set were adapted to make them easier for the children to access and to access immediately as the attention spans of such young children will be short and they will become distracted while they wait for parents to cut out lots of shapes or to construct a book. Another issue to be mindful of is that related to the children's safety. On occasions, non-safety scissors were available to the group but they were freely available and left on the floor. The research team believe this is a safety issue, however, it was not accepted by a Sure Start staff member who said:

I thought the resources were as appropriate as they could be considering the children's motor skills and therefore they're not really going to be able to cut out. I think it was also modelling, just because your child can't do it, doesn't mean that you can't do it together.

In addition, it should be remembered that parents/carers are ultimately responsible for their own children during the sessions.



Messy activities were presented to the LEEPs for 1s group on one occasion and perhaps the use of painting aprons would have helped to make parents more relaxed about carrying out the task and less concerned about the effect on the child's clothing.

One of the parents made reference to this as one of the things she would like done differently within the programme.

Occasionally advance notice of wet play, etc., would be good, to bring a change of clothes.

Parental Volunteers

The commitment of getting parents/carers involved in the planning and delivery of Sure Start projects and activities is a major initiative at Leam Lane. The vision is that in time, parents will take increased responsibility over the planning and running of the different projects alongside the support of Sure Start staff if needed.

The LEEPs for 2s programme observed by the evaluation team had the advantage of having established parent volunteers involved. One parent volunteer helped in the delivery of the programme alongside a Sure Start staff member. At the time of our evaluation the parent volunteer who was present for the first two sessions had previously attended LEEPs with her own child and based on this positive experience, wanted to help in the delivery of the programme. This parent volunteer had not undertaken the necessary training (at the time of the research) and was helping out on a short-term basis. The second volunteer who began to assist at the sixth session of our evaluation had completed the LEEPs training and was committed to assisting in the delivery of the programme for the longer term. This particular volunteer was the first trained parent volunteer to actually assist in the delivery of the programme and Sure Start staff informed the evaluation team there were a number of other parents who were also interested in doing the training and becoming parent volunteers.

Having the assistance of a parent volunteer has a number of benefits for the LEEPs programme, one of which being the practical implications of having a second person to assist with the programme, as noted by one Sure Start staff member:

... the practical side as well, because it's quite hard work when you're on your own setting up the room and being in two places at once...

Apart from the practicalities of helping to prepare the venue with materials and resources accessible for carers and children attending the programme, having a second person available is also important for the delivery of the programme. A second person enables staff to cover more within the session and allows staff to speak directly with parents about a certain topic, whilst the second person is supervising the children. Attempting to deliver all aspects of the programme with only person has been highlighted as a difficulty by Sure Start staff involved (and a difficulty the research team observed in action) with the delivery of both LEEPs programmes. One Sure start staff member told us:

I think the extra member of staff really is great, because obviously I can't split myself, sometimes ten ways ... even if it's just with the practicalities of the group.

Although LEEPs is based on the national PEEP programme and is therefore used in conjunction with the 'Learning together with Ones' and 'Learning together with

Twos' folders, Sure Start staff strive to adapt the information from the folders to the particular group they are working with. Although continual planning on a weekly basis is needed, this was not always regarded as a positive experience, as noted by a Sure Start staff member, who valued the additional input an extra person could contribute:

... planning as well, you know, can become quite repetitive, some of the sessions, so to have somebody else and ideas coming in, that was fantastic.

The two parent volunteers who were involved in the delivery of the LEEPs for 2s programme had both previously attended the LEEPs programme with their own children and had also attended other Sure Start programmes in the area. Their input into how a session went was invaluable, as they drew on their previous experience of when they attended the programme. This input helps Sure Start staff to further develop the programme and to make it as effective and as enjoyable as possible for both the carers and children, alongside being informative and topic-based. A Sure Start staff member described how useful this was in the on-going evaluation of the sessions that were completed with a view to reviewing practice:

So the benefits to that is that we do the evaluations, she [parent volunteer] could see from the parent's point of view as well, from taking her son for a year. So when we discussed the talk times and things, [I said] do you think this went well? or do you think this? ... she was able to say, 'well, when I attended and I had [child], this is what I thought and ... It was great to have that kind of viewpoint on it.

A second person present can – whilst not taking over complete responsibility – help to share the responsibility and tasks with the other person, which can only have a positive effect. This additional person can help to enable the group leader to 'step back' and evaluate how a session is going and how the carers and children are participating. This gives the group leader an extra opportunity to evaluate the programme and consider ways how best to further develop it:

I think if you're working alongside someone such as the parent volunteers, you actually have that opportunity to stand back sometimes whereas if you are working on your own, you know, hands-on a lot of the time and it's not until after the session you might take a step back and think ... I wonder how she felt about that, or you know, it's hard to be able to change it within the session if you're kind of working on your own. (Sure Start staff member).

When parents attend the sessions and see other parents participating as volunteers, it is hoped that this will help to give them confidence and encourage them to become more involved in the programmes offered by Sure Start. This is a sentiment held by a Sure Start staff member who said:

... I think as well parents see that parents can volunteer for Sure Start and realise that the parents who are volunteering are you - just part of the LEEP group and they've chosen to take part in the training or whatever. Then hopefully it might generate ideas for other parents to become more involved and - not necessarily volunteer for LEEPs - but volunteer with any sort of

groups that we've got. The children obviously are quite familiar with the two parents who volunteered also...

Parents who have completed the PEEP/LEEPs training are beginning to assist with different groups which is encouraging. It appears that Sure Start staff - certainly within these programmes - are successfully working towards their goal of involving parents in the planning, review/evaluation and delivery of Sure Start programmes. This was supported by a Sure Start staff member who said:

The parents who've done the training are beginning to support which is fantastic, and I have discussed the possibilities of becoming a group leader and perhaps myself or another member of staff being supportive for a while until we get more ... so, hopefully we'll have two parents running the group eventually...

The benefits of involving parents as volunteers cannot be under-estimated, and is an area to be highlighted as an example of good practice.

Reflexive practice

One of the most striking things which emerged from our research was that the delivery and format of the LEEP's programme was flexible, and was subject to change based on the experiences of the Sure Start staff, comments from the researchers and from the parents themselves. This can only be seen as a positive feature of the programme, and all credit must go to the staff members and parents involved. Based on this reflexive practice, we adopted a similar approach to the evaluation, and, based on our observations, we were keen to discuss the group leader's evaluations of the sessions and, where we felt appropriate to offer suggestions that would help the group leaders and the programmes during the research rather than waiting until the programme was completed. However, we were tentative in our approach and were never explicitly asked for feedback or suggestions, despite having been quite clear that we would welcome such feedback on our own 'performance' both within the group and as evaluators. The evaluation team were sympathetic to the working situation of the team leader(s) and endeavoured to suggest small changes that may have added to the programme.

One particular example of reflexive practice was revealed during our observations of the Leeps for 1's sessions. Of the six sessions observed, two were led by two members of staff and the remainder by one member of the Sure Start team who remained constant throughout. It was not possible at the time for two members of staff to be available all the time to lead the group. However, it was recognised and acknowledged by staff we spoke to that ideally, two members of staff (or two people at least) are required to deliver the programme. When there was only one person present to facilitate the sessions, we observed that it was difficult to deliver all aspects of the programme to the group, namely having the opportunity to discuss the different topics and the aims and objectives of the sessions with the carers. This idea was echoed by a member of Sure Start staff, who told us:

... there is only one of me and therefore some of the activities that the programme folder suggests, are more difficult, particularly discussion times and that sort of thing.

In order to overcome this problem and after discussion with the parents who were attending the sessions, it was agreed that the sessions would focus on the creative activities until such time as a second member of staff - or parent volunteer – was available to assist with the delivery of the programme. This approach worked well and parents supported and agreed with this decision. The evaluation team observed that this approach did work well as a short-term solution for this particular group as the core group of carers and children had attended week after week, and they completed the tasks and activities enthusiastically. It was felt by the evaluation team, however, that the parents would have benefited from the discussion sessions, as through discussion as a group it could have created an opportunity for the carers and the Sure Start staff member to discuss the different activities (such as collage or making books) the children took part in and their significance in relation to early learning and the broader issues of child development.

The LEEPs programme is ongoing, which can have both advantages and disadvantages in terms of planning, delivery, and reflection. On the one hand, LEEPs is not a 'discrete' block of sessions with a beginning, middle and an end, with time for evaluation and reflection which can then be fed into the planning of the next programme, and if necessary, changes in practice to improve delivery. On the other hand, however, sessions still need to be planned and delivered, and reflection and evaluation and feedback has to be carried out 'on the hoof', which can be difficult. The preparation for the LEEPs for 1s sessions we observed was carried out by the assistant educational psychologist who has attended the programme twice who said:

I haven't currently sort of planned the sessions that we are doing at the moment, I just planned a 'block'.

Although the sessions were planned in advance in 'blocks', they were adapted and changed slightly by the Sure Start staff member that delivered the programme. The advance planning of the sessions were done mainly as a foundation to base the individual sessions on, and not as a rigid outline – an approach that appeared to work well. The Sure Start staff member who delivered the group appeared natural and confident in her delivery of the sessions. The Assistant Educational Psychologist was asked by one of our evaluators if she felt the delivery of her planning was what she had expected – to which she replied:

... because I planned so far in advance I found [group leader] very natural with the parents, it wasn't obvious to me, I couldn't remember which ones I'd planned and there had been tweaks I'm sure because of the way everyone approaches in a slightly different way, so they certainly were different but not necessarily in a negative way.

The activities and session themes are taken directly from 'Learning together with Ones' and the 'Learning together with Twos' PEEP folders which all parents and children are given to keep at their first session, although some adaptations are made. These folders contain the written information for parents on the PEEP programme,

outlines the sessions and activities to take place and the reasoning behind them. The two members of Sure Start staff who delivered the programmes had adopted a different approach to the content outlined in the folders. Although carers have the opportunity to refer to the folders before/after sessions, in the LEEPs for 1s sessions there was no explicit reference made to the folder by the Sure Start staff members. In contrast, the Sure Start staff member who delivered LEEPs for 2s used the folder in conjunction with handouts in the delivery of the sessions. Parents did not appear to have a say in what was included in a session, although they were asked to occasionally contribute suggestions for songs. We would recommend giving parents the opportunity to suggest other possible activities that could be included as part of the programme. Such a process could be incorporated into an on-going reflexive/evaluative model of development, which could be an important part of the programme given that it is a 'roll on' roll off' programme where parents could be attending for a considerable length of time.

When asked, parents did make alternative suggestions to the research team of themes and activities that they said they would like to see included as part of the LEEPs for 1s programme, and examples included:

I would like to see more physical activities.

I do think that education, health, food and things like that is beneficial.

Concerns about the literacy levels of parents are real, and should be taken seriously. They were always a consideration in our evaluation and in the type of research tools we used. As part of the delivery of the LEEPs for 2s programme carers were asked to refer to and read information contained in the 'Learning Together with 2s' folder. Certainly with these two particular groups of carers, it appears that literacy levels were high, and as our questionnaire survey results reported, and our interactions with the parents/carers.

As the programme is ongoing, each week following the sessions, a Sure Start staff member discussed the session informally with one of the evaluation team. It would generally be reported by the Sure Start staff member that the sessions had went well and that she had achieved to cover what she intended to cover. The Sure Start staff members generally mentioned how she felt the parents and children had participated in the session and at times offered alternatives she felt may have worked better. The main aspect a Sure Start staff member mentioned was her belief that she felt parents and children enjoyed the sessions as she felt this was most important:

I hope that I bring some fun to the group, because at the end of the day, yes, it does have a purpose, and yes, it does have a structure, but if it's no fun then what's the point?

A written recording system was available to Sure Start staff adapted from the PEEP evaluation document, but due to a combination of increased levels of work and time restraints this was not completed. Although the Sure Start staff involved in these programmes agreed that ongoing evaluation was necessary for future development of the programme, they had different views on the process of evaluation. One staff member said:

... it's just that I think you can over-evaluate what is sometimes quite simple ideas. Personally, I would rather sit and look at the term as a whole, not least because I've got the sessions planned, but I know exactly what happens at those sessions and I remember how they worked and how they didn't work. I will remember who reacted well and who didn't, because I know the group well enough and I know what they're like, and I know how... and I will remember that. So I need to look at it as a whole... for me that works better.

Another Sure Start staff member felt there was a need for outside, independent evaluation when she told us:

I think it's very important, sometimes it's hard to find the time to stand back and reflect. I think another pair of eyes.... Another person's point of view is really valued. I think we are achieving our aims, but it's nice to have that extra point of view to see or that evidence really to suggest whether it does or it doesn't, or whether we are reaching our aims or we're not.

It was generally accepted there was a need for the LEEPs programme to be externally evaluated. However, one Sure Start staff member believed an evaluation over a longer period would be more beneficial:

I think it's [the Leeps programme] in need of evaluation - it would be nice to have a long-term one in terms of the long-term impact on the children. I think that sense of sort of justification and reward as a practitioner, just to know that it's worth it

In regards to what Sure Start staff hoped to gain from this evaluation, the team received different viewpoints. One staff member viewed the external evaluation as a means to identify areas of the programme which are working well or are not working well, in the hope of further developing the programme. Another member of staff was more cynical in that she felt our evaluation could only be beneficial if we suggested practical, achievable recommendations:

I think it can only be advantageous in terms of recommendations you know and reflection, as long as there's sort of practical ... something you can do, otherwise you just bang your head against a wall because there's some limits of funding and the way Sure Start works... you obviously can't do anything...

This is a valid point and something the evaluation team was mindful of throughout the evaluation process.

The Sure Start staff involved in the planning and delivery of LEEPs for 1s were aware of our evaluation before we contacted them to ask permission to observe the programme. Although they were aware of the purpose of the evaluation one staff member did say she was initially unaware of how detailed the evaluation was going to be:

I don't think I really fully understood that, but yes, I certainly knew it was happening and certainly knew that we were to inform about what we were doing and give opinions and try to move the programme forward.

Sure Start staff were very welcoming and accommodating to the research team. They spoke to the carers who attended the group prior to us attending, informed them of the purpose of our evaluation and asked them verbally their permission for our evaluators to attend the programme for six consecutive weeks. When the evaluation team attended the first of the block of six sessions, a Sure Start staff member introduced the team to the carers and explained to them their purpose for attending the individual sessions. However, the team also introduced themselves to the carers individually in an attempt to build a relationship with the carers from the onset. We felt this was important in order for carers not to feel threatened in any way from our presence and to interact naturally with their children. This links well with the view held by a Sure Start staff member regarding the atmosphere she aims to create at the sessions, to:

... make it a very comfortable place to come along to, where everybody is friendly and it is welcoming, and nobody is being scrutinised and nobody's being looked at as to how they're dealing with their child or what they're doing, because they should be free to come along without feeling like anyone's doing that.

From discussions with Sure start staff, the presence of the research team within the sessions had no effect on the structure or delivery of the sessions. Initially Sure Start staff did feel a little uncomfortable, which is an entirely natural reaction to having individuals observing a session you are involved in. One staff member told us:

... to start with, was perhaps thinking "ooh, I'm a bit uncomfortable about this, somebody coming in and watching", but actually in reality, it's become a lot more invisible.

The evaluation team took an active, participatory, role within the group, involved themselves with all aspects of the session, for example, took part in the singing, activities, etc., as well as interacting with parents and children. The involvement of the evaluation team within the group was commented on by Sure Start staff members, who felt our personable approach helped to create a relaxed atmosphere and put their anxieties at ease as well as the carers. There were only two evaluators who attended the sessions, one evaluator only attended two of the six sessions for both programmes. A small number of evaluators can blend in with a group and are less visible than if there were a number of evaluators present, a factor we were mindful of given the previous experience of evaluating another Sure Start programme:

I think had there been three people then that would have felt more intimidating because that's just purely on a numbers basis, you're more aware of it and to be aware of it may inhibit your comfortableness with the group which kind of goes against all the comfortable things that I'm trying to set up.

From our questionnaires, formal interviews and informal chats with parents and carers, the majority of were happy with the content of the sessions and the activities their children were asked to do. One parent from LEEPs for 1s thought the book making activity was a 'bit too adventurous for ages so young' while another parent

said she would like the time allocated for the arts and crafts activity to be longer. The respondents from the LEEPs for 2s sessions reported that they had not been surprised by any of the activities expected of their child throughout the programme. One respondent was pleasantly surprised, however, by her child's willingness and ability to tidy up after the activity within the session as he was reluctant to do so at home.

All the carers were happy with the Sure Start staff members who delivered the group and felt they had worked in a professional manner but had managed to build up a good rapport with the parents and developed a friendly, comfortable environment. One parent said:

I find [name] fine and think she works well with the children, and I could definitely talk to her about anything.

Overall, the general feeling expressed by a Sure Start staff member was that the sessions had 'went well' and Sure Start staff felt they had covered the material they intended to cover in the sessions. Delivering a programme such as LEEPs for 1s does raise certain issues which a Sure Start staff member explained:

... you can never tell how well a session is going to go until you get there, because however well you plan it, you don't know how people are going to take it, and at the end of the day Sure Start's about people volunteering to go to these things, we're not pushing any of this stuff on them, so you know it's up to them whether they will turn u. It's up to them how much they get out of it, and how much they interact with the child, how much they get involved, so you can't guarantee that but generally speaking it's a nice group and it's a group that's gelled quite well together, which helps a great deal.

This staff member went on to describe the need for a reflexive and consultative way of working within programmes such as LEEPs, and that:

... you can learn as you go along, it is very much a learning curve and you will make mistakes and you will do things that people don't like and it's ... you have to just pick up from that and try and do something else, and change it, alter it and ask people what they want.

Parents and the LEEPs programmes

It became clear through our research that the Sure Start staff member who was involved in the delivery of the programme and the carers involved were aware of the formal aims and objectives of LEEPs for 1s. Individual carers, however, interpreted these aims in a more personal way which was meaningful to them. All the respondents replied that they hoped that attending LEEPs for 1s would enable their child to develop social skills. Some of the respondents also offered alternative skills their child would develop; one parent reported the importance of attending LEEPs for 1s for her child to "promote interaction" with other children while another parent hoped that it would "encourage children's development skills, share, learn to read". The majority of the respondents (75%) said that they attended the programme for their children to have the opportunity to mix and play with other children of a similar age.

These ideas were also voiced by a member of Sure Start staff who described the aim of LEEPs for 1s as to:

... get them into starting to do activities, starting to share, starting to interact with the other children, starting to be aware of them, to know them, to recognise them and to feel comfortable in that space, so that when they do get to [Leeps for] twos they can develop more with the things that we do ... get more into the activities and hopefully, especially for children like [name] who's very shy, hope that it has benefits for him that he will come out of himself and so that by two and by three, and by nursery he's not going to be a child that's cowering in the corner.

The respondents to the LEEPs for 2s questionnaire seemed confident about what they felt were the aims of LEEPs for 2s. Although one respondent did not attempt to answer this question, the majority of the respondents believed LEEPs for 2s aided their child's learning through play and taking part in activities. One carer felt LEEPs for 2s was aimed at both the child and the carer, and told us that it:

'encourages parents to learn together with children' and 'praise children for all their achievements'.

Like another Sure Start project in the local area (Messy Days), the LEEPs programmes are distinctive in that they are designed to benefit *both* the children and the adults (carers) who participate. It is hoped that carers who participate will also take part in other services in the area. This fits with the general ethos of Sure Start, in that participation in one activity or project will usually result in parents taking part in others. Our questionnaire survey revealed that attendance at other Sure Start projects or activities was high, the majority of the respondents of both questionnaire surveys (with the exception of one carer) reported that they attended other projects or activities provided by Sure Start, namely Gym time and attendance at the Sure Start nursery. Respondents also attended any 'one-off' events provided by Sure Start.

Parents were asked what other pre-school activities (outside of Sure Start) they were using or accessing within the area. Only one carer from LEEPs for 1s reported using other services in the area, that being the ABC nursery in Felling. Two carers from the LEEPs for 2s programme reported using services provided by other organisations, namely a local Toddlers group.

With regards to LEEPs for 1s, parents were clear about their role within the programme. All of the respondents saw their role within LEEPs for 1s as one of encouragement and support. The main benefit of attending LEEPs for 1s held by parents (75%) was the opportunity for their child to develop their social skills and meet with other children. 50% of respondents also mentioned the importance of learning, the development of their child's learning skills as a consequence of attending LEEPs for 1s be that in connection with social skills or learning new activities.

The main benefits for their children of attending LEEPs for 2s held by respondents varied, but the main benefit mentioned was their child's ability to sit quietly and

listen. Other benefits included development of social skills and an interest in books and reading. One respondent whose child was nearly three and therefore soon attending nursery felt her child had gained as much as he could from the LEEPs for 2s programme, but that attendance at LEEPs had helped him:

Not much more to gain from the sessions, as nursery is not long now which I'm sure he is ready for.

The reasons carers gave as to the benefits of attending LEEPs for 2s were personalised to themselves, and the individual needs of their child. One respondent felt LEEPs for 2s aided her child in preparation for nursery. Another respondent replied she attended the programme so her child had the opportunity to meet and interact with other children his own age. This respondent felt her child was shy when in the company of other children and therefore wanted to build up his confidence and social skills. Other respondents gave similar reasons why they attended the programme. They made reference to extending their child's '*interest in books*'. One of the main aims of the LEEPs programme is to encourage children to become interested in early reading and in the enjoyment of books.

There is no consensus between parents for LEEPs for 1s on which part of the LEEPs for 1s sessions they enjoyed most. Each parent enjoyed different aspects of the programme. There was, however, a general agreement in responses to the question 'which part of the LEEPs for 1 session do you think is the most useful to you in playing and working with your child?'. Of the respondents, 75% replied they felt the part of the sessions where their child took part in the activity set up by the group leader was the most useful and beneficial.

There was a general consensus among all questionnaire respondents from LEEPs for 2s in regards to what part of the sessions they find most enjoyable. All the respondents enjoyed seeing their children doing the activity organised by Sure Start staff – one carer added that she enjoyed:

watching the outcomes and expressions of children participating in their tasks'.

Storytime and songs with actions were also enjoyed by carers. One parent responded from LEEPs for 1s that she doesn't do any of the activities covered in the session at home. She said:

... we have tried, but she is not interested when it is only her and me – she prefers to be physically active, running, jumping, etc.

The other parents responded that they did do similar activities at home and gave some examples which included making shakers, making books and art activities. However, in connection with those activities suggested by the group leader to try at home, only half reported that they had tried these activities. One parent said she only engaged her children in these activities '*if I feel that they would enjoy them*'.

It is encouraging to note all respondents from LEEPs for 2s replied they did do activities covered in the sessions at home and respondents gave examples such as cutting and glueing pictures on cards and making books. All the respondents also

replied they did partake in activities suggested by Sure Start staff during the sessions. Respondents gave examples which included physical activities while others gave examples of more specific ideas they took from the programme such as '*encouraging and praising*' their child and '*time out on the stairs*' following a tantrum.

One of the main aims of Sure Start programmes generally is to reach those most in need, or those which can be referred to as 'hard to reach' groups within the area (see Sure Start, 2002). The definition of such groups can - and do - vary hugely. They can include hidden populations, marginalised groups, vulnerable groups and non-participants. In relation to the LEEPs programme, it could very well be the case that it is not meeting those most in need, as inevitably, the 'hard to reach' are often unrepresented in the projects. LEEPs are popular programmes and it appears that advertising for the programmes are adequate, and so perhaps no additional advertising is needed. However, an ongoing active recruitment is necessary, given the roll on roll off nature of the programme. 'Over-recruiting' appears to work well for LEEPs for 2s, and additionally, there is a natural pull-through from LEEPs for 1s, which is an illustration of the positive effectiveness and impact of that particular programme. What would be interesting to explore, and helpful to the recruitment strategy for the Leeps for programmes is to investigate why those parents who registered and expressed an interest in LEEPs then did not attend.

Exploring impact

The provision of Sure Start generally in the area was viewed as a beneficial service by the parents that attended the LEEPs programmes. Through informal chats with our evaluators, the majority of parents reported that Sure Start has had a positive effect on their child and family, as well as being beneficial to themselves. One respondent described the benefit that she got from attending sessions run by Sure Start:

I think Sure Start as a whole is a very good thing, I'm pleased it's in this area and I'm pleased it's happened when my children are at the age they've been at and I do definitely feel that as a whole it's been very good for the children, I think it's been a good start for them generally.

The main response from carers who attended LEEPs for 1s as to what they personally gained from attending the programme was the opportunity to socialise and meet other parents/carers. One mother said she attended the programme so she could:

meet other adult company.

Similarly, another mother replied that attending LEEPs for 1s gave her:

a chance to socialise and chat generally with other mums.

This is very important especially for those parents who may feel isolated with their child and who do not have family and close friends to rely on for help and support. The LEEPs programmes are clearly meeting the needs of those parents who wish to network and socialise with other adults, and this, encouragingly, fits well with the

findings from previous research into PEEP, which stated that parents viewed PEEP as a source of support and encouragement.

The respondents in the LEEPs for 2s questionnaire sample all believed they received different things from attending the programme. One respondent felt that the most important thing she got from attending the programme was:

the enjoyment my grandson gets from being part of the group.

Another respondent felt that by attending the LEEPs group, this gave her an allocated slot of time to spend with her children. This is an important point as it is sometimes difficult in everyday life (due to many other commitments) to allow for, or make time to, spend solely with your child without interruptions. One respondent felt attending LEEPs for 2s was important to her as an opportunity for her to meet with and chat with other adults.

Questionnaire responses to the question about what parents felt their child gained by attending LEEPs for 1s revealed several key themes. Most of the respondents (60%) believed their child had become more confident from attending the programme. Children developing social skills, meeting and interacting with other children of a similar age were also important features. Another mother felt that as a result of attending LEEPs for 1s, her children had the opportunity to take part in extra pursuits and that it was:

for my children to have activities outside the home or familiar people and surroundings.

One parent responded that her child ‘*enjoys the singing and reading books*’. Again, this is positive given that one of the main aims of the LEEPs programme is to encourage children to become interested in early reading.

The majority of respondents (75%) from the LEEPs for 2s survey felt their child has further developed their social skills as a result of attending the programme. One carer replied her child had the opportunity to become ‘*familiar with the nursery building*’. As the LEEPs for 2s programme takes place in a nursery at a local school while the new Sure Start build is being completed, this gives both carers and children the opportunity to become familiar with the nursery environment.

More specifically, the impact on children attending the LEEPs programmes was expressed by parents. All the parents felt that LEEPs had a positive impact on their child, one parent described what she felt her child gained by attending the programme:

I would assume a lot of it's about interaction with children, other children, and I suppose a chance for me myself to interact with my child, to try and develop the child in communication skills, arts and crafts, sitting down and listening, and I think it's getting them ready for possibly nursery, for school.

With reference to their experiences of the LEEPs programmes all the respondents to the questionnaire felt their child/ children will have benefited from attending LEEPs when they start school. One mother told us:

he will already have spent a short time with other children.

The majority of the respondents (75%) from LEEPs for 1s feel that their child/ children will have learnt good social skills:

It helps them to learn to share and socialise with kids and other strange adults, with Mum there for reassurance when needed to know what is acceptable behaviour by them and others.

The respondents who attended LEEPs for 2s were more specific about the skills they felt their child has gained in preparation for school. One mother said:

Yes, possibly the fact that they realise they can have some time with other children in a playing, etc., environment along with some - but not too harsh – discipline.

While another mother said:

They will be able to follow a routine in a classroom situation, being able to share with other children and being able to help to tidy up when told.

One respondent felt her child will not have benefited solely from having attended LEEPs for 2s in regards to the structure and routine within the programme, but argued that other Sure Start groups ‘often have these factors’.

The potential benefits for the children were also highlighted by Sure Start staff. One staff member commented on skills children who attended LEEPs gained as a result of attending the programme:

It aims to bring children into a safe and comfortable atmosphere, but an atmosphere with a certain amount of routine, it's aiming to get them used to being within a social environment, i.e., mixing with other children and getting to know other children, sharing that space and sharing you know whatever else it might be within that group.

A Sure Start staff member also echoed the views expressed by parents and reported that she felt LEEPs was a good venue for adults to share and socialise too, and described the programmes as:

... providing a support network either through the parents or the staff and sources of advice and information made available, a forum for parents to share any worries, and to sort of subtly tweak into positive parenting.

In addition to the increased confidence in their children, a Sure Start staff member told us that she thought the children who attended LEEPs also gained some kind of increased confidence, and that this was recognisable to the parents themselves:

I think all the parents realise that they can see what their children gain out of it, especially a lot of feedback is about social interaction and the sharing and turn-taking and those sort of elements, confidence building, especially at that age.

Conclusions and recommendations

In relation to the original aims and objectives of the LEEPs for 1s, and LEEPs for 2s programmes, they are working well and fit well with the general ethos of the Leam Lane Sure Start programme. The perceived value of Sure Start Leam Lane generally can be illustrated well by one parent, who told us:

I think Sure Start as a whole is a very good thing, I'm pleased it's in this area and I'm pleased it's happened when my children are at the age they've been at and I do definitely feel that as a whole it's been very good for the children, I think it's been a good start for them generally.

The LEEPs programmes within the area are equally as popular and are highly regarded by parents (and staff) who have participated.

Unlike some projects within the Leam Lane Sure Start area, the LEEPs programmes have the advantage of being firmly grounded in a national, well-established programme that it now widely being delivered. In both programmes the evaluation team observed skilful delivery and planning and a very effective use of resources. Credit must be given to all the staff and the parents involved.

As part of the evaluation brief, and taking a case study approach, we set out to explore the process of delivery, with a view to identifying good practice, and to make suggestions as to how services and delivery of the programmes could be improved. With this in mind, we make the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. Ongoing review and evaluation

As with any programme or project, ongoing review and evaluation is continual, and necessary. Staff themselves identified the need for evaluation, and the difficulties they faced with trying to evaluate programmes such as LEEPs which are on-going, rather than delivered in discrete blocks with a break in between. Whilst not impossible, such review and evaluation would be made easier for the group leaders if they had the additional support of another person leading the group.

We would like to recommend that this person be a parent volunteer specifically, who has a clear remit to become actively and formally involved in evaluation and review. As we have reported, this does happen informally already, with parent volunteers reporting on their own experience of LEEPs and what worked well did not work well for them. This can help both with the review of practice, and the development of future sessions and planning. We would like to see this role more formalised, and it could be taken further in that parents can take the lead in the design and development of evaluation questionnaires following particular sessions or activities. Such a task would require some training in basic evaluation/research techniques, and if it was to happen, this should take place as an integral part of the PEEP/LEEPs training for the parent volunteer. This would hopefully be beneficial to all those involved – the parent would gain additional skills and also would have the slightly more objective view of being outside of the Sure Start staff role.

2. Delivery

Perceptions and views of the content and delivery were positive. It is important that the group leaders inform the parents about the activity that is planned for upcoming sessions, particularly if there are messy activities planned, so parents can be more practically prepared and therefore relax during the sessions.

In addition, we would recommend that each block of sessions remains themed, as this works very well, but that the relationship of the sessions to early education goals be made more explicit. Likewise, we would recommend that each session be introduced by the main 'Aims and Objectives' of the sessions (and therefore relate these to the goals) and explain quickly the 'what', 'how' and 'why' behind a session. This could be presented on a single side of A4 and be very brief and to the point. This then can be fed back into the ongoing evaluation/review process, which could also explore how these aims of the sessions are being met.

As part of the ongoing evaluation and review of programmes, we would recommend that group leaders (or volunteers) offer direct feedback to parents for 'successful' tasks being achieved. This was something that did not directly happen during the sessions we observed, but we did observe that there were opportunities to do so, which could help parents attending to become more confident and secure in their parenting abilities.

Relating to this, we would like to recommend that there is dedicated training to ensure the awareness of group leaders and parent volunteers to the specific developmental needs and typical behaviours of the youngest children. This is important in a specific sense in order to fulfil the expectations of the LEEPs programmes but also because at times parents make comments that may need to be gently challenged in order to have a positive impact on the nature of the child – parent relationship.

With regards to the particular activity of Story time, we would recommend that the story is provided at a time when either the eating/drinking sharing aspect has finished. For LEEPs for 1s, stories may need to be accompanied by additional props such as puppets/to use more lift the flap or interactive books, plus stories that require a response from the children such as animal noises etc. We would also recommend that in LEEPs for 1s, the group leaders could encourage children to sit on parents' knees and to come in closer so that they can all see the book.

2. Dedicated venue

The difference of the two venues hosting LEEPs for 1s and 2s was striking, and our findings serve to highlight the need for a defined, purpose-built, designed environment (such as the nursery) which contains age-appropriate toys – which can be adequately stored away when not needed to avoid distraction. Clear defined areas would also help the group leaders deliver the programmes on a practical level, but there are additional benefits for the children and parents also. Such a space will help children to become familiar with such environments as they near nursery, pre-school, school age, where they will encounter environments such as this every day. Knowing that the area contains age appropriate toys, and that the area is safe and secure, will also help the parents to relax and therefore participate fully in the programmes.

3. Ground rules

The Ground Rules appear to work well and are respected and recognised by the parents involved in both programmes. We would like to recommend that these rules are made more explicit to any 'new' parents (perhaps in an induction pack) joining the group, and that they include reference to the 'Story time' being a time for the children whilst parents are quiet.

4. Recruitment

As the LEEPs programmes are ongoing, recruitment is always continual too. The current practice appears to be working well, and they are popular programmes. The strength appears to be twofold: firstly, the approach to date has been multi-method – i.e. PR and publicity takes the many forms of posters, leaflets, and through health professionals. Secondly, group leaders are proactive in recruiting, and draw upon previous participants of earlier programmes. The most positive feature we can highlight is the apparent 'pull through' from LEEPs for 1s to LEEPs for 2s. This illustrates that parents have had a good experience previously to continue their involvement, and also once they arrive at LEEPs for 2s, the vast majority stay until their child reaches 3 years old. What would be interesting to explore is the relationship between those attending Baby LEEPs (if it is to continue) and consequent pull through from that programme. In this context, it is important that Baby LEEPs is publicised well and offers a positive experience to parents and children, as one could argue that this is the 'starting point' for many parents and their first contact with Sure Start.

5. Involving parents

We recommend that a second person is essential for the effective and successful delivery of both LEEPs programmes. However, we do not suggest that this is another member of Sure Start staff; we wish to recommend that this is a parent volunteer. Both programmes are increasingly involving parents as volunteers, and this should be identified as good practice which can be developed even further. We cannot underestimate the benefits that such an involvement – if done well, and adequate training provided - can have on all those involved. The benefits to the programmes and the parents themselves are numerous:

- On a practical level – e.g. setting up, supervising children at times
- With delivery – taking responsibility for particular tasks/roles
- With review and evaluation – an additional viewpoint for reflection and review
- As a role model for other parents – to encourage them not only in becoming volunteers themselves, but in terms of confidence-building and accessing other Sure Start services
- To be available to parents who come with more than one child/ who may be feeling quite overwhelmed / in need of extra support.
- As an evaluator/reviewer.

The support of a parent volunteer would take the pressure of the group leader and would provide more opportunity for the group leader to inform the parents about learning objectives, etc.

Appendix 1

LEEPs for 1s Parent Questionnaire

Name

- 1. Do you live in Leam Lane?**
- 2. How long have you lived in Leam Lane?**
- 3. How did you find out about Leeps for 1s?**
- 4. When did you start coming to Leeps for 1s?**
- 5. Did you know any of the other people in the group before you came to Leeps for 1s?**
- 6. Do you **arrange** to see any of the people from Leeps for 1s away from the group?**
- 7. How old is the child who comes to Leeps for 1s?**
- 8. Does s/he go to any other pre-school activities (such as toddler groups, nursery)?**
If so which ones, **when** and **where**?
- 9. Does s/he go to any other Sure Start programmes or projects in the area?**
If so which ones, **when** and **where**?
- 10. Do you have/care for any other children?** (if so are they girls/ boys and what ages are they)
- 11. What have you been told that Leeps for 1s is supposed to do?**

12. Why do you come to Leeps for 1s?

13. What main things do *you* get from coming to Leeps for 1s?

14. What main things do you think *your child* gets from coming to Leeps for 1s?

15. Which part of the session do you *enjoy* most (mark with a 1 and give a reason/ reasons why you particularly enjoy this bit), second favourite (mark with a 2) and third (mark with a 3). You don't have to mark three if you don't enjoy three parts.

- Children having play/ greeting time when they arrive
- Children doing the activity that Helen has set up
- Sharing books and toys after the main activity
- Snack time
- Story time
- Songs and goodbye

16. Which part of the Leeps for 1 session do you think is the most *useful* to you in playing and working with your child (mark with a 1 and give a reason/ reasons why you particularly enjoy this bit), second favourite (mark with a 2) and third (mark with a 3). You don't have to mark three if you don't find three parts useful.

- Children having play/ greeting time when they arrive
- Children doing the activity that Helen has set up
- Sharing books and toys after the main activity
- Snack time
- Story time
- Songs and goodbye

17. Do you ever do any of the activities that Helen has set up at home?

If so which ones? And why?

If not, why?

18. Do you ever do any of the activities that Helen suggests at the end of a session?

If so which ones?

If not, why?

19. What do you think is the main benefit of Leeps for 1s for your child NOW?

20. Have you been surprised by any of the activities/ ideas expected of your child at Leeps for 1s?

21. Can you think of something that your child did at Leeps for 1s that surprised you (i.e. a good thing)?
Why do you think it happened?

22. Do you think that Leeps for 1s will have helped your child when s/he starts school?

If yes, in what way?
If no, why not?

23. Finally if you could change *one thing* about Leeps for 1s what would you like to change and how would you want it to be changed?

Thank you for spending time completing this form. All information will be used for research purposes only by the University team. All information will be treated confidentially and no real names will be used.

Would you be willing to talk about Leeps for 1s with one of the university research team members? Please circle either Yes / No

Appendix 2

Name

1. Do you live in Leam Lane?
2. How long have you lived in Leam Lane?
3. How did you find out about Leeps for 2s?
4. When did you start coming to Leeps for 2s?
5. Did you know any of the other people in the group before you came to Leeps for 2s?
6. Do you **arrange** to see any of the people from Leeps for 2s away from the group?
7. How old is the child who comes to Leeps for 2s?
8. Does s/he go to any other pre-school activities (such as toddler groups, nursery)?
If so which ones, **when** and **where**?
9. Does s/he go to any other Sure Start programmes or projects in the area?
If so which ones, **when** and **where**?
10. Do you have/care for any other children? (if so are they girls/ boys and what ages are they)
11. What have you been told that Leeps for 2s is supposed to do?
12. Why do you come to Leeps for 2s?

13. What main things do *you* get from coming to Leeps for 2s?

14. What main things do you think *your child* gets from coming to Leeps for 2s?

15. Which part of the session do you *enjoy* most (mark with a 1 and give a reason/ reasons why you particularly enjoy this bit), second favourite (mark with a 2) and third (mark with a 3). You don't have to mark three if you don't enjoy three parts.

- Sharing books before the session begins
- Children having greeting time when they arrive
- Songs and action rhymes
- Children doing the activity that Kerry has set up
- Story time
- Snack time
- Songs and goodbye

16. Which part of the Leeps for 1 session do you think is the most *useful* to you in playing and working with your child (mark with a 1 and give a reason/ reasons why you particularly enjoy this bit), second favourite (mark with a 2) and third (mark with a 3). You don't have to mark three if you don't find three parts useful.

- Children having play/ greeting time when they arrive
- Children doing the activity that Helen has set up
- Sharing books and toys after the main activity
- Snack time
- Story time
- Songs and goodbye

17. Do you ever do any of the activities that Kerry has set up at home?

If so which ones? And why?

If not, why?

18. Do you ever do any of the activities at home that Kerry suggests during the session?

If so which ones?

If not, why?

19. What do you think is the main benefit of Leeps for 2s for your child NOW?

20. Have you been surprised by any of the activities/ ideas expected of your child at Leeps for 2s?

21. Can you think of something that your child did at Leeps for 2s that surprised you (i.e. a good thing)?
Why do you think it happened?

22. Do you think that Leeps for 2s will have helped your child when s/he starts school?

If yes, in what way?
If no, why not?

23. Finally if you could change *one thing* about Leeps for 2s what would you like to change and how would you want it to be changed?

Thank you for spending time completing this form. All information will be used for research purposes only by the University team. All information will be treated confidentially and no real names will be used.

Would you be willing to talk about Leeps for 2s with one of the university research team members? Please circle either Yes / No

Appendix 3

University Consent Form

I hereby give my consent for my child's photograph to be taken.

The photographs may be used in a report about the Leam Lane Sure Start Project.

This report will be produced by the University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

..... (signature)

.....Name (please print)

.....child's name

Appendix 4

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